EXHIBIT A

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(AOL 166) Customizing Search Results by Automatically Integrating Personalized Search Parameters into A Search Strategy

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INNOVATION:

This innovation is a cross-section between two concepts:

(1) storing a set of user-specified search parameters, and

(2) automatically integrating selected ones of stored search parameters into a search query based on the subject matter of that query, which subject matter may be explicitly indicated by the user or inferentially determined based on user input.

More particularly, one of implementation contemplates soliciting general search parameters from a user before a particularized search is initiated, and associating the solicited search parameters with the user in a manner that makes those parameters available for automatic integration into future particularized searches initiated by the user. For instance, a file may be stored on the user's computer, or general search parameters themselves may be associated with the user's roaming profile, passport, init packet, or the like.

The generalized search parameters may pertain to a variety of different subject matters. They are intended to represent information useful in filtering, further filtering, or sorting search results obtained when performing perfunctory searches. For instance, generalized search parameters may include the user's address and health insurance carrier, such that future particularized searches for medical care providers may be automatically refined or organized based on proximity and eligibility, rather than making the user manually manipulate a search engine to consider this criteria at the time of a particularized search, which requires the user to understand the search engine and remember the parameters at the time of the search. Furthermore, in many instances, this approach will relieve the user of the burden of sifting through pages of search results that are not relevant or customized to their needs, for instance, medical care providers that are not proximate to their home or eligible under their insurance in the example above.

To enable automatic association of appropriate parameters with future particularized searches, generalized user-specified search terms may be stored or associated with a label or type. In the example above, for instance, search terms may be stored as follows:

Health Insurance Carrier: Kaiser

User's Home Address: [Street Address]
[City/State/Zip]

User's Work Address: [Street Address]
[City/State/Zip]

Thereafter, at the time of a particularized search by the user, the subject matter of the search is identified, inferentially or through explicit entry by the user, and relevant types of generalized search parameters are identified based on the subject matter of the search. Again using the example above, when it is determined that a user seeks to search for a medical care provider, the generalized search parameters of location and medical insurance provider may be identified as relevant to this particularized search. Where available, user-specified information related to those parameters are extracted from the general search parameters associated with the user, and those parameters are used to return or organize better search results, the search is performed using the available subset of optimal parameters, or the user is asked to provide the missing parameters at the time of the particularized search. For example, if the user-specified parameters did not include the insurance carrier of a user, the exemplary search for a medical care provider may be performed by supplementing the user's input with location alone, or the user may be asked for their medical insurance provider at the time of the particularized search.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED WHEN DRAFTING UTILITY APPLICATION:

(1) Who determines and maintains a list of generalized search parameters to be associated with each of several particular subject matters? That is, who determines that a search for a medical care provider should integrate data concerning a user's location and medical insurance carrier?
(2) Is a ranking associated with each of the generalized search parameters for a particular subject matter, so that results satisfying several of the criteria may be appropriately sorted?
(3) What entity identifies the appropriate subject matter of a particularized search, and searches for stored user-specified search parameters relevant to that subject matter? Stated differently, must this technology be adopted by conventional search providers, or may it be retrofit to work in conjunction with conventional search engines?
(4) Are the user-specified search parameters integrated into a search string and therefore used to produce the number of resulting hits, or are the user-specified parameters instead applied to the results of a search that is performed without their integration (which may provide a means for retrofitting existing search engines)? If the latter, are the user-specified search parameters used to filter the list of hits, or merely sort that list of hits?
(5) Do we contemplate an interface that will present the user with the customized search query at the time of a particularized search, enabling the user to modify out-dated or unwanted search parameters?

PROBLEM ADDRESSED/STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Conventional Search Engines: Compare input search terms against Metadata in order to identify displayable results. These processes also allow for refined searching of input terms against particular identified types of metadata. For instance, when performing a patent search, a user is able to enter "SN" to indicate that subsequent search terms should be applied against serial number metadata. Furthermore, some of the conventional search engines permit comparison of input search terms against full or partial text.

When applying this conventional technology, users typically obtain several pages of search results for any given search query, necessitating extended periods of review. Clearly, improved search technologies are needed.

BACKGROUND ART

Passport and other services that store user-specified data for other purposes. Search providers that allow for manual identification and submission of search parameters types.

INVENTIVE ASPECTS

Notion of automatically identifying subject matter and associated scanner parameters. Notion of allowing user to create/maintain/retrieve from personalized scanner profiles.

OTHER APPLICATIONS OF INVENTION

CONCEPTION

PAST PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

None.

FUTURE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

None anticipated.

SEARCH TERMS:

Search, personalized, personalization, customized

AOL PRODUCTS

None contemplated presently.

POTENTIAL LICENSEES:

All major search providers, and applications incorporating or leveraging such search technologies. Examples include: Google, Yahoo, Microsoft MSN, Alta Vista, Lycos, as search providers and Microsoft and Earth Link as applications that integrate search technology.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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